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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT : Requirement for Employment of the OXCART  
over South China and North Vietnam

REFERENCES : a. USIB-D-41.14/286 (COMOR-D-25/209)  
11 March 1966, Special Limited Distribution  
b. Memorandum for Holders of USIB-D-41.14/286  
15 March 1966, Special Limited Distribution  
c. USIB-D-41.14/281 (COMOR-D-25/206)  
1 March 1966, Limited Distribution

1. The attached memorandum on the subject from the Chairman, Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance (COMOR), containing the COMOR response to paragraph 1.b. of reference a., is circulated herewith for consideration by the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) of the Recommendations in paragraph 13.

2. Accordingly, the attached report is scheduled on the agenda of the USIB meeting for 17 March 1966.

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Executive Secretary

Attachment

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MEMORANDUM FOR: United States Intelligence Board

SUBJECT: Requirement for Employment of the  
OXCART over South China and  
North Vietnam

1. Beginning in August 1964 the Chinese Communists began to build up their air forces in South and Southwest China. Although this buildup appears to have leveled off, some increase may occur later this year when airfields on which construction was started in early 1965 are completed.
2. In June 1965 the Chinese began to introduce ground forces into North Vietnam. So far this deployment does not appear to have involved combat forces. The personnel are apparently engineering and support troops with appropriate staffs and some AAA elements.
3. The foregoing actions may be either defensive or offensive in nature. We do not have adequate intelligence to provide the basis for a sound interpretation. Furthermore, our intelligence is insufficient to tell us what other actions may have been taken by the Chinese Communists in preparation for military contingencies.

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4. The only sources of firm intelligence available to us on Chinese military activities in South China and North Vietnam [redacted] and aerial photography. However, Chinese Communist [redacted]

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[redacted] and our aerial reconnaissance of the areas of concern has been severely limited by a series of factors. These include:

a. The introduction of surface-to-air missiles in North Vietnam which significantly limits the area to which the U-2 has access.

b. Conventional anti-aircraft defenses in North Vietnam are exceptionally strong and place a severe limitation on the reconnaissance that can be conducted by tactical aircraft.

c. MIG-21 aircraft deployed to bases in South China have attempted intercepts on U-2 aircraft during the past year. At least one reason for this deployment is the interception and destruction of U-2 aircraft. To date all intercepts have been unsuccessful but have interfered with several missions by causing the pilot to deviate from planned track. Their increased proficiency at high altitude intercepts presents a slightly increasing threat [redacted]

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d. [redacted] aircraft flight over South China

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has taken place since 28 November 1965. An official stand-down was in effect from mid-December to 4 March 1966.

e. KH-4 has been employed against South China and North Vietnam and has yielded some useful intelligence, but its resolution is not sufficient to provide the required details concerning Chinese ground forces.

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[redacted]

g. The OXCART reconnaissance vehicle has not been used. This is an intelligence asset with excellent photographic capabilities, and like the U-2, can react in response to favorable weather opportunities.

5. Other forms of intelligence collection, including both clandestine and overt means, have very little capability of providing information concerning Chinese military preparations in South China and

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North Vietnam. If the Chinese have decided to introduce combat forces into North Vietnam or if they feel that they may have to make such a decision in the future, we would expect the Chinese Communists to initiate a series of actions to facilitate the rapid deployment of sizeable forces into North Vietnam should they believe this step necessary. Based on our current experience it is possible that even large scale preparatory actions may not be identified and defined on a timely basis without high resolution photography.

6. Our most pressing requirement, therefore, is for a current base of high resolution photography of South China and related parts of North Vietnam to determine whether the Chinese Communists are taking steps to facilitate a large scale introduction of combat forces into North Vietnam. We have selected reconnaissance objectives that should be covered (see Tab A). It is also essential that we maintain surveillance of key areas at frequent intervals to detect changes that might indicate changes in the Chinese military position.

7. COMOR is advised with regard to climatology that there is a significant longitudinal variation in weather, best described by an East-West separation at 107°E longitude. West of 107°E (Southwest China)

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weather deteriorates from eight to fifteen good days in April to six to nine days in May and one day in June. East of 107°E (Southeast China) it deteriorates from three to five good days in April and May to one day in June. A good weather day is described as Category I-II conditions, less than 25 per cent total cloud cover at local noon. The best period for photographic coverage of the area is from October through March and the worst June through August. April and May like September are transitional months when transient good weather areas may occur and need be exploited on a short notice.

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8. The targets of concern to this problem are spread over such a large area and the number of expected days of good weather is so few that all means of acquiring high resolution photography must be employed.

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10. The required photography could be collected by the OXCART. 25X1

Because of its relative immunity to enemy defenses the OXCART is the only vehicle that can be expected to collect the desired photography of the heavily defended main routes leading from South China into the Hanoi area.<sup>a</sup> It is expected that most of the targets within the priority areas could be covered by approximately two to three missions but that as many as six or eight missions in Category II or better weather might be required to achieve substantially complete coverage.

11. [Redacted] could be used to supplement photography obtained

by the OXCART, particularly in portions of South China where defenses are the weakest. If the U-2 only was to be employed, it could cover the bulk of the accessible targets in approximately three missions, but as many as six or eight might be required in Category II or better weather to achieve substantially complete coverage. It is not anticipated that the U-2 would be used in North Vietnam due to the SAM threat.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The State COMOR member while concurring in the unique utility of OXCART for coverage of this target area, noted COMOR had stated in the recommendations of COMOR-D-25/208 (USIB-D-41.14/285) that: "SAC U-2 and drone programs and theater tactical reconnaissance assets be used to provide base line coverage of targets along the rail and road lines leading from Hanoi to the Chinese border and to maintain continued surveillance of these lines at approximately weekly intervals thereafter." He believes that the above assets could provide some of the desired intelligence though he notes that at present there is no survivability estimate on fighter-type reconnaissance for this immediate area.

<sup>b</sup>The State COMOR member notes that 26 U-2 China missions have been conducted since the last loss to enemy action, 21 of these missions being in South China. He believes [Redacted] may still serve a primary role.

[Redacted]

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12. Conclusions: After a thorough review of the reconnaissance objectives involved in this intelligence problem, the defenses available to the Communists, and the reconnaissance assets available to the United States, we believe that the problem of collecting the necessary high resolution photography falls into three categories:

a. An important portion of the task from an indications standpoint and the most urgent from the standpoint of timing is to acquire coverage of the main routes of access from Communist China into the Hanoi area. These routes fall in large part in areas defended by surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery. Based on operational factors and photographic capabilities the OXCART is the only reconnaissance resource that can assure us of optimum coverage of this portion of the problem during the period of relatively favorable weather.

b. The second portion of the problem is to acquire coverage of those reconnaissance objectives in South China related to the activities of Chinese Communist ground forces.

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These objectives in the main lie between Kun Ming and the North Vietnamese border and between Nan Ning and the North Vietnamese border. A number of related objectives, however, are spread over a wide area of South China.

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If these defenses are relatively unchanged from their November 1965 status, most objectives in South China could be covered by the U-2. If, however, there has been recent improvement in defenses, the OXCART would be the only vehicle capable of acquiring photography of the protected areas within the time frame of the current period of relatively good weather.

c. Once a current base of high resolution photography has been acquired, it will be necessary to continue a program of periodic reconnaissance to collect photography of substantial portions of the target network in North Vietnam and South China to keep our knowledge current. Again the OXCART has the highest degree of

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assurance of being able to get most of the required photography. As additional knowledge of Chinese defenses is acquired, however, it may be possible to employ the U-2 to get much of the required photography.

13. Recommendations:<sup>a</sup> On the basis of the preceding analysis of the problem, it is recommended that:

a. The OXCART be used immediately to acquire the necessary current high resolution photography of North Vietnam.

b. ~~The OXCART and the U-2 be employed immediately to acquire the required photography in the South China area.~~

c. ~~continuing follow-on & a flexible program to obtain maximum surveillance~~  
~~the maximum surveillance possible that weather will allow,~~

d. ~~KH-4 be employed to the maximum~~  
~~to supplement the coverage obtained under a through c.~~

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Chairman

Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance 25X1D

a The State COMOR Member believes that plans for use of OXCART should be developed in conjunction with examination of the results of  and preparations of survivability studies on tactical reconnaissance on the Hanoi/Communist China lines of communication.

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